

Message Text

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ORIGIN AF-08

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA PRIORITY

INFO AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO PRIORITY

UNCLAS STATE 119336

E.O. 11652:N/A

TAGS: PFOR, US, ET

SUBJECT: PRESS GUIDANCE ON ETHIOPIAN SITUATION

REF: STATE 116687

1. WASHINGTON POST REPORTED FRIDAY U.S. GOVERNMENT "IS CONSIDERING SET OF DRAFT INSTRUCTIONS TO ITS AMBASSADOR IN ETHIOPIA TO TRY TO GET ETHIOPIANS TO DROP THEIR PLANS FOR AN ALL-OUT MILITARY OFFENSIVE AGAINST SECESSIONIST PROVINCE OF ERITREA, U.S. GOVERNMENT SOURCES SAID YESTERDAY."

2. POST SAID "DRAFT INSTRUCTIONS WOULD TELL U.S. AMBASSADOR ARTHUR HUMMEL TO ADVISE ETHIOPIANS THAT WASHINGTON DESIRES THEM TO RETURN TO NEGOTIATING TABLE WITH ERITREAN REBELS." ARTICLE SAID "INSTRUCTIONS REPORTEDLY WARN THAT ANY SUCH OFFENSIVE WOULD DO "IRREPARABLE HARM" TO ETHIOPIANS RELATIONS WITH UNITED STATES, WHICH IS VIRTUALLY SOLE ARMS SUPPLIER TO ADDIS ABABA MILITARY REGIME." (POST UNCLASSIFIED

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ARTICLE SENT ADDRESSEES VIA USINFO.)

3. QUESTION RAISED AT DEPARTMENT PRESS BRIEFING BY SEVERAL CORRESPONDENTS. FOLLOWING IS EXCHANGE:

Q: WHAT IS U.S. POSITION ON PROJECTED LARGE-SCALE WARFARE

IN ETHIOPIA WITH ERITREANS, IN VIEW OF FACT THAT ETHIOPIA IS LARGELY EQUIPPED WITH AMERICAN WEAPONS?

A: AS WE HAVE INDICATED IN PAST IN THAT PARTICULAR SITUATION, WE CERTAINLY FAVOR NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN PARTIES CONCERN AND WE WOULD HOPE THAT AN ACCEPTED SOLUTION OF THAT PROBLEM CAN BE FOUND THROUGH NEGOTIATIONS.

Q: IS U.S. TAKING ANY MEASURES TO TRY TO REINFORCE ITS VIEW?

A: I AM NOT IN POSITION TO COMMENT ON DIRECT CONTACTS WE MAY HAVE ON THIS.

Q: WE HAVE A REPORT ON A RECENT SALE OF EIGHT F5E FIGHTER BOMBERS TO ETHIOPIA FOR USE IN THIS OFFENSIVE AGAINST ERITREA. DO YOU KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THAT?

A: I BELIEVE THERE WAS SOME CONFIRMATION OF SUCH A DELIVERY SOME TIME AGO BUT CERTAINLY THIS IS NOT DIRECTLY RELATED TO ANY INTERNAL DISTURBANCE IN ETHIOPIA. WE HAVE HAD LONGSTANDING MILITARY SUPPLY RELATIONSHIP WITH ETHIOPIA.

Q: HOW LONG AGO DID THAT DELIVERY TAKE PLACE?

A: I'LL HAVE TO CHECK ON THAT. (DELIVERY WAS MADE APRIL 15. CONTINGENCY PRESS GUIDANCE PREPARED THEN BUT QUESTION NOT ASKED.)

Q: DO YOU KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT TWO WARSHIPS ALSO BEING SOLD TO ETHIOPIA?

A: I DON'T HAVE ANY DETAILS ON THAT. I'LL HAVE TO UNCLASSIFIED

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CHECK ON IT.

4. FOLLOWING IS CONTINGENCY GUIDANCE PREPARED FOR SPOKESMAN:

Q: THE WASHINGTON POST REPORTS THIS MORNING THAT WE ARE CONSIDERING SENDING INSTRUCTIONS TO OUR EMBASSY IN ADDIS ABABA TO ADVISE THE ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT TO CALL

OFF ITS PROJECTED OFFENSIVE IN ERITREA. CAN YOU
COMMENT ON THIS? CAN YOU CONFIRM OR DENY IT?

A: IT WOULD BE ENTIRELY INAPPROPRIATE FOR ME TO COMMENT
ON A MATTER OF SUCH SENSITIVITY WITHIN THE USG AND SUCH

CONFIDENTIALITY BETWEEN TWO GOVERNMENTS. THIS IS NEITHER
A CONFIRMATION NOR A DENIAL. I WILL SAY, HOWEVER, THAT
WE HAVE ALWAYS FAVORED NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE PARTIES
CONCERNED IN ERITREA IN ORDER TO FIND AN ACCEPTABLE
SOLUTION TO THAT PROBLEM. THIS POSITION WAS STATED
RIGHT HERE IN MARCH OF LAST YEAR, AND WE HAVE CONVEYED IT
ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS TO THE ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT AND TO
THE ERITREAN INSURGENTS.

Q: HAVE WE DONE SO LATELY IN CONNECTION WITH THE RUMOURED
OFFENSIVE?

A: AS I SAID BEFORE I AM NOT COMMENTING ON OUR DEALINGS
OR LACK OF THEM WITH THE ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT ON THIS
SUBJECT WITHIN THE PRESENT TIME FRAME.
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